



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY
(MANPOWER AND RESERVE AFFAIRS)
1000 NAVY PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20350-1000

February 1, 2022

The Honorable Dusty M. Johnson
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0000

Dear Representative Johnson:

Thank you for your recent letter to the Secretary of the Navy requesting the Medal of Honor (MOH) be awarded posthumously to Lieutenant Commanders Lance Massey, Eugene Lindsey, and John Charles Waldron for their actions in June 1942 during the Battle of Midway. I am responding on behalf of Secretary Del Toro.

Your admiration for these three Naval aviators is understandable. Their heroic and selfless actions, and those of the other aviators in their squadrons, at Midway are widely known, well documented, and universally celebrated. The military decorations they received in recognition of their actions have also been the subject of great interest and scrutiny. A few months after the battle, they were all awarded the prestigious Navy Cross, the Nation's second highest decoration for valor. Many of their fellow squadron mates were also awarded the Navy Cross, the Distinguished Flying Cross, or other prestigious combat medals.

During November 1942, congressional representatives from South Dakota petitioned the Navy to specifically reconsider the case of John Waldron, and award him the MOH. The request was referred to the Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet—Admiral Chester Nimitz at the time. Admiral Nimitz and his staff conducted a thorough review of the matter and concluded the Navy Cross had been the appropriate decoration. His letter of March 1, 1943, to the Chief of Naval Personnel stated, *The Board upon review of other air groups which participated in the Battle of Midway judges that the action of Lieutenant Commander John C. Waldron, U.S. Navy, when reviewed with comparable cases, did not and does not warrant the award of the Congressional Medal of Honor. The Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, appreciates the great services rendered by this officer to the Navy and his country in the Battle of Midway; and that the award of the Navy Cross was based on a comparable performance of duty by other officers in this action. The decision of the Board is therefore approved and the Navy Cross is considered the appropriate award.*

Immediately following the war, the Navy conducted a widespread review of personal and unit decorations made during the war, and specifically reviewed almost 30,000 individual cases in which nominations had resulted in no award or a lower award than originally nominated. Official records confirm that this post-war review board determined the actions of LCDRs Waldron and Massey did not merit award of the MOH. We did not find documents explicitly stating that LCDR Lindsey's case was reconsidered, but it is reasonable to presume that his actions were known and used as comparison for the other reviews. In 1942, all of these awards were routed through Admiral Nimitz's office, and favorably endorsed to the Secretary of the

Navy for award of the Navy Cross. Therefore, when the Pacific Fleet Board of Awards reviewed LCDR Waldron's case a few months later, it is certain LCDR Lindsey's nomination was in their files and was among the *comparable cases* with which LCDR Waldron's actions were examined.

Department of Defense regulations preclude reconsideration of any previously approved military decoration, or previously considered and disapproved award nomination, for upgrade to the MOH unless new, substantive, and materially relevant evidence is presented that was not reasonably available when the original nomination was considered. The regulations clarify that new evidence that merely adds details to what was previously provided will not meet the new and relevant requirement. Examples of acceptable evidence include official reports and eyewitness testimony. Without such new evidence, the Department can take no further action on these cases.

This determination in no way diminishes the heroism of these three men, or the Navy's pride and gratitude for having men such as them in our ranks. Their bravery and total devotion to duty continue to inspire generations of Sailors and particularly our Naval aviators.

Thank you for writing the Secretary, and for your continued support of America's Navy. If I can be of any further assistance, please let me know.

Sincerely,

2/1/2022

X

(b) (6)

(b) (6)

Acting CORB Counsel

(b) (6)

By direction

WALDRON, John C. MISSING ~~7096~~ Lt. Comdr. USN

USS HORNET - VT 8

58825

Midway

Recommended for NAVY CROSS by CinC Pac Ser 18-P15(1)
of July 18--Ref: CinC Pac Ltr. P15(1)/QB/(05) Ser.
3013 of July 16, 1942--~~1st~~ ^{2nd} Bd. Cincpac File P15(1)
/(05) Serial 3112 of July 28, 1942.

Awarded: Aug. 6, 1942 Bd. Awd. Meeting *No change*
BRON Ser. 3060 dtd. 12-19-46 App.
Adm. Name

For extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in
the line of his profession as Squadron Leader of VT-8 in the
AIR Battle of Midway." On June 4, 1942, Lt. Comdr. J.C. Wal-
dron, U.S.N., knowing full well that he was without fighter
protection and that he had insufficient fuel to return to his
carrier, gallantly led his squadron in a torpedo (over)

attack against the enemy. He effectively drove home the attack against the murderous assaults of many enemy aircraft and against an almost solid barrage of anti-aircraft fire. This action was instrumental in the defeat of the enemy forces and was in keeping with the best traditions of the Naval Service.

Perm. Citation & Copies being held in safe VT-8 9/15/42

1397

Nov 25

Recommendation of Sen. Gurney & Rep. Case Have been referred to CinCpac, in case he desires to reconsider his previous award of Navy Cross.

March 1, 1943 CincPac returned correspondence which had been referred to Pacific Fleet Board of Awards, which adhered to its former recommendation for the award of the Navy Cross. No further action.....

WALDRON, John C.

Lt.(jg)

USNR

U.S.S. SC-525

France

171007

BOARD OF DECORATIONS & MEDALS

AWARDED: BRONZE STAR MEDAL by Com8thFlt File P15 Serial
5993 Dated 19 Dec. 1944 Rec'd Bd D&M 12-30-44.

"For distinguishing himself by meritorious achievement as Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. SC-525 while engaged in screening fire support operations off the coast of the Franco-Italian Riviera in September 1944.

Lieutenant (junior grade) Waldron handled his ship with great skill and determination while laying a smoke screen for the protection of minesweeping and fire support ships off Menton, France under extremely hazardous conditions. He coolly and courageously maintained his ship in its ex-

The excellent teamwork, resourcefulness, and outstanding devotion to duty displayed by Lieutenant (junior grade) Hainroth, Master Chief Petty Officer (juniors) and the Naval Ser-

8825
rda/p15/Hib:ajf
serial 5060

Board of Review for Decorations and Medals.

19 December 1946

From: Senior Member, Board of Review for Decorations and Medals.
To: Navy Department, Board of Decorations and Medals.

Subj: Awards - review of recommendations for.

Ref: (a) Commander Hornet Air Group ltrs dtd 17 Jun 1942

1. The board has reviewed the cases cited in reference (a) and recommends that no change be made in the awards previously made to:

✓ Lieutenant Commander John C. WALDRON, USN	(deceased)
✓ Lieutenant Raymond A. MOORE, USN	(deceased)
✓ Lieutenant James C. OWENS, Jr., USN	(deceased)
✓ Lieutenant (jg) George M. CAMPBELL, USN	(deceased)
✓ Lieutenant (jg) Jeff D. WOODSON, USN	(deceased)
✓ Ensign William W. ABRAHAMSON, USNR	(deceased)
✓ Ensign William A. CHAMBERLAIN, USNR	(deceased)
✓ Ensign Harold J. ELLISON, USNR	(deceased)
✓ Ensign William A. EVANS, Jr., USNR	(deceased)

(b) (6)

✓ Ensign John P. GRAY, USNR	(deceased)
✓ Ensign Henry H. BENYON, USNR	(deceased)
✓ Ensign Oliver M. MOORE, USNR	(deceased)
✓ Ensign Grant W. TENTS, USNR	(deceased)
✓ BOBBS, Horace F., Cmdr, USN	(deceased)
✓ McFEE, Amelio (N), AM1c, USNR	(deceased)
✓ Miles, Robert B., AP1c, USN	(deceased)
✓ PETTIT, Tom H., AM1c, USN	(deceased)
✓ BIRD, Ross H., Jr., AM1c, USNR	(deceased)
✓ CLARK, Dalton L., AM1c, USN	(deceased)
✓ CHERRY, Ottway D., Jr., AM1c, USNR	(deceased)
✓ FISHER, Ronald J., AM1c, USN	(deceased)
✓ PHILLIPS, Bernard P., AM1c, USN	(deceased)
✓ CALKINS, Max A., AM1c, USN	(deceased)
✓ FIELD, George A., AM1c, USN	(deceased)
✓ MONTGOMERY, Robert K., AM1c, USN	(deceased)
✓ SANDILL, William F., AM1c, USN	(deceased)
✓ FICOU, Aswell L., S2c, USNR	(deceased)
✓ POSTON, Francis S., S2c, USN	(deceased)

for services as set forth in the basic correspondence.

2. The above recommendations have been approved by direction of the Secretary of the Navy.

SELECTION

BOARD

U.S. Navy
Enlisted File Data 101

ROSS F. COLLINS
By direction 15 JAN 1947
Received
Bd of Decorations and Medals *See*

Cincpac File No.
Pac-08-jep/ob
P15/LDY(1)

UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
FLAGSHIP OF THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF

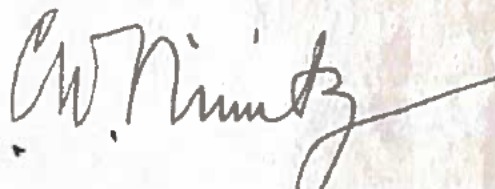
Serial 613

1st Endorsement on
Supers Ltr. Pers-328-
ogh No. 58825 of
November 25, 1942.

OFFICE OF NAVAL PERSONNEL
NAVY DEPARTMENT
MAR 1 1943
5-8825-
1943 MAR 16 PM 4 16

From: Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet.
To : The Chief of Naval Personnel.
Subject: Lieutenant Commander John C. WALDRON, U.S. Navy -
Award for.

1. Returned after having been considered by the Pacific Fleet Board of Awards.
2. The Board upon review of other air groups which participated in the Battle of Midway judges that the action of Lieutenant Commander John C. WALDRON, U.S. Navy when reviewed with comparable cases did not and does not warrant the award of the Congressional Medal of Honor.
3. The Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet, appreciates the great services rendered by this officer to the Navy and his country in the Battle of Midway; and that the award of the Navy Cross was based on a comparable performance of duty of other officers in this action. The decision of the Board is therefore approved and the Navy Cross is considered the appropriate award.


C. W. NIMITZ

FINISH FILE Registry
(Decorations & Medals)

6	10	22	23	24	31	32	36	62	211	215	222	223
---	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	----	-----	-----	-----	-----

1. Amount of initial cost of decorations & medals, No. before release

58825

Pers-327-hww *Lem*

December 23, 1942

LIEUTENANT COMMANDER JOHN CHARLES WALDRON, U. S. NAVY
RE: SERVICE OF

1900 Aug 21 Born in Fort Pierre, South Dakota.

1920 Jun 16 Appointed a Midshipman from 3d District South Dakota.

1921 Jun 9 Joined KANSAS.
Aug 30 Cruise completed.

1922 Jun 3 Joined FLORIDA.
Aug 30 Cruise completed.

1923 Jun 9 Joined NORTH DAKOTA.
Aug 29 Cruise completed.

1924 May 15 Detached Naval Academy and Jun 30 to duty on SEATTLE,
Puget Sound, Wash. (Det Jun 4; Pro Jun 5; Rep Jun 29)
Jun 4 Commissioned regular Ensign from Jun 5, 1924.
Jun 4 Accepted appointment and executed oath as Ensign.

1926 Jan 12 Detached from SEATTLE Jul 1, 1926.
May 13 Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida. (instruction)
(Rep Aug 10, 1926; Det Jul 19, 1927)

1927 Jun 16 Commissioned, ad interim, Lieutenant, junior grade,
from Jun 5, 1927.
Jul 26 VT Squadron 18, Aircraft Squadrons, Scouting Fleet
(duty involving flying) (Rep Aug 18, 1927; Det Dec
13, 1927)
Dec 7 VT Squadron NINE-B, Aircraft Squadrons, Scouting Fleet
(duty involving flying) (Rep Dec 14, 1927; Det Sep
13, 1929)

1928 Feb 16 Commissioned regular Lieutenant, junior grade, from
Jun 5, 1927.

1929 May 24 Temporary additional duty Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md.,
connection aviation training of Midshipmen. (Completed
Sep 13)
Sep 12 Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida (duty involving
flying. (Rep Oct 10, 1929; Det Jun 6, 1931)

1931 Apr 23 VS Squadron THREE-B (U. S. S. LEXINGTON) (duty invol-
ving flying. (Rep Jul 1, 1931; Det Jun 30, 1932)

1932 May 3 V O SQUADRON 4, B (U. S. S. COLORADO). (Rep Jul 1, 1932;
Det May 31, 1934)

Finished title
Registrar (Com-4-4015)

Jun 4
1943

1934 Mar 13 VP Squadron SIX-F (duty involving flying). (Rep Jun 28, 1934; Det Jun 5, 1936)

May 25 Commissioned regular Lieutenant from March 1, 1934.

1936 Apr 3 Aircraft, VB Squadron 1-B, Battle Force (duty involving flying). (Rep Jun 30, 1936; Det Nov 14, 1936)

Jul 1 Temporary additional duty VT Squadron TWO-B (duty involving flying). Upon completion December, 1936, return to BV Squadron ONE-B.

Nov 3 U. S. S. SARATOGA (duty involving flying) (Aircraft Carrier, First Line). (Rep Nov 14, 1936; Det Sep 24, 1938)

1938 Sep 16 Scouting Squadron Three (duty involving flying). (Rep Sep 25, 1938; Det Jun 5, 1939)

1939 Feb 13 Naval Air Station, Pensacola, Florida, (duty involving flying). (Rep Jun 27, 1939; Det Oct 12, 1939)

Jul 27 Commissioned regular Lieutenant Commander from Jul 1, 1939.

Oct 10 Naval Proving Ground, Dahlgren, Virginia (duty involving flying). (Rep Oct 17, 1939; Det Nov 16, 1939)

Oct 10 Bureau of Ordnance, Navy Department, Washington, D. C. (duty involving flying). (Rep Nov 17, 1939; Det Nov 24, 1939)

Oct 10 Third Naval District, New York, N. Y. (duty involving flying as Naval Inspector of Ordnance, at the plant of Carl L. Norden, Inc., 80 Lafayette Street, New York, N. Y. (Rep Nov 24, 1939)

1941 Jul 24 Commanding Torpedo Squadron Eight (U. S. S. HORNET) (duty involving flying). (Rep Aug 10, 1941.

1942 Aug 7 Next of kin:

(Wife)

(b) (6)

NAVY CROSS with following Citation:

"For extraordinary heroism and distinguished service beyond the call of duty as Squadron Leader of Torpedo Squadron EIGHT in the 'Air Battle of Midway', against enemy Japanese forces on Jun 4, 1942. Grimly aware of the hazardous consequences of flying without fighter protection, and with insufficient fuel to return to his carrier, Lieutenant Commander Waldron, resolutely, and with no thought of his own life, delivered an effective torpedo attack against murderous assaults of enemy Japanese aircraft and against an almost solid barrage of anti-aircraft fire. His courageous action, carried out with a

Enlisted File
Register (Corrected)

gallant spirit of self-sacrifice and a conscientious devotion to the fulfillment of his mission, was a determining factor in the defeat of the enemy forces and was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

American Defense Service Medal (Fleet Clasp) - September 1939 to December 1941.

Missing in action since June 4, 1942.

CARTER GLASS, VA., CHAIRMAN

KENNETH McKELLAR, TENN.
CARL HAYDEN, ARIZ.
ELMER THOMAS, OKLA.
MILLARD E. TYDINGS, MD.
RICHARD D. RUSSELL, GA.
PAT McCARRAN, NEV.
JOHN H. OVERTON, LA.
JOHN H. BANKHEAD, ALA.
JOSEPH C. O'MAHONEY, WYO.
HARRY S. TRUMAN, MO.
THEODORE FRANCIS GREEN, R. I.
FRANCIS MALONEY, CONN.
DIONIS CHAVEZ, N. MEX.
JAMES M. MEAD, N. Y.
WALL DOCKY, MISS.
BURNET R. MAYBANK, S. C.

GERALD P. NYE, IOWA
STYLES BRIDGE, N. H.
HENRY CABOT LORIMER, MASS.
RUFUS C. HOLMAN, OREG.
WALLACE H. WHITE, JR., MAINE
CHAR GURNEY, S. DAK.
C. WAYLAND BROOKS, ILL.

EVERARD K. SMITH, CLERK
JOHN W. R. SMITH, ASST. CLERK

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

November 18, 1942

The Secretary of the Navy
War Department
Washington, D. C.

AWARD TO BE MADE IN COMMEMORATION OF
LT. COMMANDER JOHN CHARLES WALDRON

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I wish to submit my reasons for believing that Lt. Commander John Charles Waldron should be awarded posthumously the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Under Public Law 702 of the 77th Congress, the President of the United States is authorized to present in the name of Congress a Medal of Honor to any person who, while in the naval service of the United States, shall, in action involving actual conflict with the enemy, or in the line of his profession, distinguish himself conspicuously by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty and without detriment to the mission of his command or to the command to which attached.

I believe it is considered by Navy authorities from actual records that Lt. Commander Waldron not only risked his life, but gave it, and that his actions were beyond the call of duty and not only without detriment to the mission of his command, but actually by his actions made possible the victory of the Navy in the Battle of Midway.

I feel sure that any less award will be a disappointment to his superiors and associates in the fleet, all of whom appreciate that except for Commander Waldron's brilliant diagnosis of the strategy of the enemy, the Japanese fleet would not have been found, but would have retreated safely to its home waters without the devastating losses to which it was subjected following the discovery of its position and course by Commander Waldron. His foresight in analyzing the strategy of the retreating enemy fleet and figuring out its position in time to overtake and tie it up with a torpedo attack so that subsequently squadrons of bombers and torpedo planes might be able to press the attack and destroy the heart of that fleet certainly was not only unusually courageous, but also shows unusual ability as a commander and naval officer, resulting in great service to his country.

FINISH FILE Register
(Decorations & Medals)

The Secretary of the Navy - #2

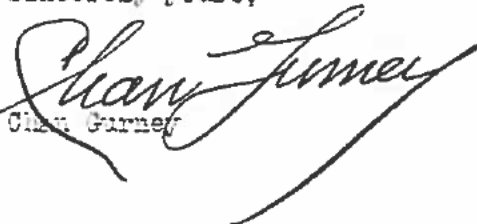
11/18/42

The fact that he was killed while performing his duty is probably beside the point, since many officers and men of the United States Navy have suffered like consequences in acts over and above the line of duty. His command was wiped out in the attack, and every member of his command is entitled to and, I believe, will receive recognition for their heroism.

Commander Waldron maintained his devotion to duty right up to the end, and I feel very sincerely and strongly that he should be recommended for the Congressional Medal of Honor, which is the highest award that his country can grant.

My State of South Dakota is very proud of the record of its sons in the armed forces of the United States, but particularly proud of this outstanding son, Lt. Commander Waldron. They feel very strongly that he should receive special recognition, and I join with them in that feeling.

Sincerely yours,



Chas. Gurney

CG:W

FINISH FILE Registered
(Decorations & Medals)

FRANCIS CASE
2d DIST. SOUTH DAKOTA

HOME ADDRESS:
CUSTER, S. DAK.

COMMITTEE ON
APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEES:
INDEPENDENT OFFICES
WAR DEPARTMENT
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D. C.

11-18-1942

Captain H. G. Patrick
Recorder of Board of Awards
Bureau of Naval Personnel
Navy Department
Washington, D.C.

My dear Captain Patrick:

Re: Pers 328-ARH
58825

I appreciated your letter of October 26 stating that you would place my previous letter relative to the decoration for the late Lieutenant Commander John Charles Waldron, United States Navy, before the Navy Department Permanent Board of Awards at its next meeting.

I have been out of the city for a couple of weeks and on my return find a letter from Mr. A. Viault, a classmate of Lieutenant Commander Waldron, which brings out a phase of his service that I had not understood.

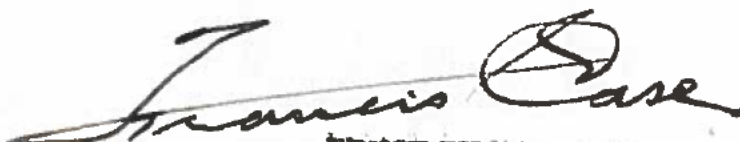
Entirely apart from his heroic work in combat, as Mr. Viault points out, "Had it not been for Commander Waldron's intuitive understanding of naval strategy, there might have been no victory at all at Midway."

Bearing out the point which Mr. Viault makes so forcefully in his letter are some excerpts from associates of Lieutenant Commander Waldron to Mrs. Waldron, assembled by Mr. Viault, which I relay to you with this letter.

I have marked certain passages in the letters and will appreciate your bringing them to the attention of the Board as you present the matter.

Sincerely yours,

FC/MMS
inclosures



FINISH FILE Registrar
(Decorations & Medals)

Viault and Viault

Attorneys and Counselors-at-Law

International Commercial and Corporate Matters

Food Drug and Cosmetic Regulations

Trade Marks and Copyrights

465 Lexington Avenue

New York

October 31, 1942

Hon. Francis Case, M. C.
House Office Building
Washington, D. C.

**AWARD TO BE MADE IN COMMEMORATION OF
LT. COMMANDER JOHN CHARLES WALDRON**

My dear Mr. Case:

1. I refer to your letter of October 20 addressed in duplicate original to Mrs. Philip and myself regarding the award proposed to be made by the Navy Department in recognition of the services of Lt. Commander Waldron of South Dakota.

2. I regret that on the occasion of my visit to Washington I had but a few hours available late in the afternoon of a single day, and that after discussing this matter with Senator Gurney I was unable to locate you on the floor of the House or to communicate with you at your office by telephone.

3. I appreciate that pursuant to the act of Congress approved on August 7, 1942, the Navy Cross is the highest award that can be made for combat only. However, as I have pointed out in previous correspondence regarding this matter the combat services alone of Commander Waldron are not controlling in this instance. Every communique and comment that I have read gives him full and unstinted credit for his uncanny and extraordinary skill in sizing up the strategy of the enemy fleet and locating it before it had a chance to get away and take refuge in its home waters.

4. Had it not been for Commander Waldron's intuitive understanding of naval strategy there might have been no victory at all at Midway. The Navy Department frankly admitted that Waldron had found the enemy and "made sure for the task force and for the Navy that the enemy was crippled at the start of the action".

5. It is incidental that Commander Waldron lost his life in the ensuing attack that he pressed home and appreciating the absence of any hope of survival. The distinguished act of conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity for which he is deserving of recognition was in taking his squadron beyond the range of their ability to return to their own carrier with the fuel available in the absolute certainty that he was on the trail of the retreating enemy and that he would overtake the enemy

FINISH FILE Registrar
(Decorations & Medals)

and attack him before the fuel of his planes gave out.

6. Many men will lose their lives in combat. All will be heroes and all worthy of recognition. What sets one man apart from another in this general group is the ability to think where the necessity for thought is immediate, and to exercise good judgment in consequence of an accurate appraisal of a given strategical situation. This outstanding accomplishment of locating the enemy and disorganizing his retreat to such an extent that the task force was able to overtake him and destroy him would have entitled Commander Waldron to the highest Congressional recognition for distinguished service, even though he and every member of his squadron had survived the attack without a scratch.

7. I do not know whether you have had any experience in flying as a passenger in aircraft over water. The horizon is limited and the expanse within which to get off course is unlimited. I remember many discussions with Commander Waldron during the period of our last association in New York when he outlined to me the difficulty of locating a fixed position in the ocean. He spent several years developing naval strategy in Hawaii, Midway, Wake and Guam. He once told me that he was intimately familiar with practically every square mile of Pacific in that area. On a test flight from Guam and return he mentioned that the chances of missing the islands on a return trip were a thousand to one because they were little more than a speck of sand in an infinity of ocean, even though the fixed longitudinal and latitudinal position of the island was known in advance. You can then imagine what accurate calculation it must have taken to figure out the course and the position of a mobile force with the entire ocean in which to maneuver and retreat beyond the range of our scout planes and other aerial forces. It was these long years of experience and intensive study in a theater of operations which few officers in the Navy knew better than he that enabled him so successfully to carry on his mission. He figured out not only the course but the position of the enemy, and he led his squadron directly toward its objective, overtaking the enemy and notifying the task force of its position, before compelling the Japanese fleet to break formation in order to resist the attack which he subsequently carried out without hesitation. When the history of Midway is written no historian will fail to give Commander Waldron credit for making possible the destruction of the four carriers and all of the planes of the enemy by the exercise of extraordinary judgment and the analysis of a strategical situation with mathematical precision.

8. I repeat that it is immaterial and incidental that he lost his life in the ensuing action. The chances are that before the end of the war he would have given up his life anyway. His contribution to the victory was not the sacrifice of his life, but the destruction of the enemy carriers and planes which his foresight and ability rendered possible for the Navy.

9. It seems to me that such service, so inevitably influential on the successful progress of the war is deserving

FINISH FILE Registrar
(Decorations & Medals)

of the very highest award within the power of the government to bestow. It is not difficult to find men who will give up their lives for their country. It is rare to find men who in the process of doing so intelligently contribute affirmatively to the winning of the war and so conspicuously distinguish themselves above and beyond the call of duty. In failing to give Commander Waldron the maximum recognition which has already been accorded to other combatants in token of deeds which, while perhaps more spectacular were of less significant military value, is to put a prize on rashness or recklessness and cheapen the value of accomplishment. I do not believe that the Congressional delegation from South Dakota should accept anything less from the Navy Department than the Congressional Medal of Honor for Commander Waldron. The bestowal of awards is not a matter to be standardized and strangled with bureaucratic redtape, but a matter of the performance of the nation's duty according to the facts of each case to those who have performed their duty to the nation with valor, distinction, honor and significant benefit.

10. Commander Waldron had no rich, influential friends to go to bat for him in connection with this matter. He was a poor farm boy from the plains of South Dakota. He came to the Navy the hard way, absolutely by force of his own determination and ability. He devoted his entire career in the Service to the strategy of aerial warfare, letting nothing interfere with that objective. By dint of hard and persistent work he became one of the ace flying officers of the Navy. He always anticipated that offensive action in his lifetime would occur in the Pacific, and he prepared himself with this single eventuality constantly in mind. When the contingency arose he was ready, and he gave to the nation the last full measure of the knowledge and experience that he had assiduously acquired. It is now up to those who survive him to leave no stone unturned to obtain for his memory and his family that degree of recognition which he so unqualifiedly has deserved.

Very faithfully yours,
VIAULT & VIAULT



c.c. (b) (6), South Dakota
Sen. Wm. T. Bulow, South Dakota
Sen. Chan Gurney, South Dakota
Sen. Claude Pepper, Florida
(b) (6), Pensacola, Fla.
(b) (6), Rapid City, S.D.

FINISH FILE Registrar
(Decorations & Medals)

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Washington, D.C.

10-20-1942

Captain H.G. Patrick
Recorder, Office of Navy Awards
Navy Department
Washington, D.C.

My dear Captain Patrick:

South Dakotans naturally have a great interest in the recognition that may be accorded the brilliant heroism of Lieutenant Commander John Charles Waldron, leader of Torpedo Squadron No. 8 in the Battle of the Midway.

We have noted with interest the citation published in a Navy Bulletin dated June 13, 1942, aboard the U.S.S. Hornet in which the following recommendation was made:

"To the personnel of Torpedo Squadron Eight, U.S.S. Hornet, the Medal of Honor with the following citation:

'For conspicuous gallantry and exceptionally distinguished service in gallantly delivering a torpedo attack against the enemy, knowing full well they had no fighter protection and insufficient gasoline to return to their carrier. For driving home an effective attack against a terrific hail of assaults by many Japanese planes, far above and beyond the dictates of duty.'"

I have been advised informally that the Board has recommended the award of the Navy Cross, which is a very fine honor, but naturally, we would like to see Lieutenant Commander Waldron receive the Medal of Honor. In view of the importance of his feat and in view of the sheer courage and extreme devotion to duty which he gave, it seems to us that he deserves the highest award that can be given.

As Mr. Viault, an attorney-at-law, 465 Lexington Avenue, New York City, and classmate of Lieutenant Commander Waldron at the United States Naval Academy, says, "His feat of heroism at the Battle of Midway is deserving of nothing less than the highest award within the power of the Government to bestow."

It would be appreciated if the citation and his record of service may be reviewed with a view to considering an award in line with the citation published.

COLLECTION BOARD
FINISHED FILE
BOARD OF DECORATIONS & MEDALS
Sincerely yours

FC/MMS

/s/ Francis Case

In Reply Refer to
No.

CV8/L21

(758)

U. S. S. HORNET

Fleet Postoffice
San Francisco, Calif.

8 OCT 1942

From: The Commanding Officer.
To : The Chief of the Bureau of Naval Personnel.
Subject: Personal effects of Lieutenant Commander
John C. Waldron, U.S.N. - disposition of.

Reference: (a) Buper 1st end. 58825-Pers-327-CKW,
dated August 10 1942.
(b) SO., HORNET letter CV8/L21, dated
June 14 1942 to SO., Navy Yard,
Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

1. Reference (b) requested that the personal
effects of subject officer be shipped to his next of kin -
Adelaide W. Waldron, 932 Brandon Ave., Norfolk, Virginia.

2. These effects were receipted for by Supply
Department representative at Navy Yard, Pearl Harbor, T.H.
June 14, 1942. By copy of this letter it is requested that
that activity advise the Bureau of Personnel when shipment
went forward, indicating BLading number and routing. Subject
officer's next of kin has requested that his personal effects
be shipped to her at 821 N. Barcelona Street, Pensacola, Fla.

C P Mason
C. P. MASON

Copy to:
SO., Navy Yard,
Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Finished File
Registrar (Correspondence)

*Mr. Schuyler says no
action to be taken.
Nov. 18, 1942.*

Finished File
Registrar (Correspondence)

NOV 18 1942

From:

(b) (6)

To:

Date: September 30, 1942.

Subject: Lt. Comdr. John C. Waldron.

From the first time that I heard of the torpedo squadron that had won the Battle of Midway it sounded like John to me. The official report confirmed it. As you know we can't write such things until released.

There is no doubt that if any one man can be said to have won the Battle of Midway John Waldron is the man. I considered John one of my best friends and his determination and courage were always outstanding. He was just coming into his own in the Navy and we can ill afford to lose him but rest assured his example will be an inspiration to the rest of us which still works for the country he loved so much.

We all regret his loss and sympathize with you and his children but there is no better way to go and if we are fortunate and strong enough to approach John's heroism at the time there is nothing more we can ask and the country will surely be saved from a grievous defeat.

(b) (6) please let me know at any time anything I can do for you.

FINISH FILE Registrar]
(Decorations & Medals)

FINISHED REGISTRAR FILE
SELECTION BOARD JACKET

From:

(b) (6)

To: Mrs. John C. Waldron

Date: July 25, 1942

Subject: Lt. Comdr. John C. Waldron.

I write to pay tribute to a grand man, a zealous patriot and a true American, Lt. Comr. John C. Waldron. He was my friend.

As the only member of his squadron who can now do so, I want to say he had the love and respect of every man in torpedo squadron #8. We all respected his judgment, and never hesitated to follow his lead.

He demanded and got for his squadron everything that the work required, and was satisfied only when every man had the equipment he needed or even desired, and always stepped forward to meet any interference or opposition to the furnishing of these things.

As between the men of the squadron he was always fair and impartial.

Before we took off from the carrier on our last flight he said "If there is any one man left I want that man to get a hit". He then lead us straight to our objective, as his navigation was perfect. As we sighted the enemy he said to the squadron "We will attack, regardless of the consequences."

As we reached the Jap fleet the Zeros came down from high altitude to give battle. One by one we met the attack. I saw his plane dive into the sea. We pressed on, every man going the last inch of his power to move.

By pure luck I got near enough to launch my torpedo which I headed straight for the Jap carrier. The Zeros deserted me, apparently fearing their own anti-aircraft fire. As I neared the deck of the carrier the fire was constant, but faulty.

When I heard the explosion caused by my torpedo I knew I had not failed my "Skipper". Nothing else mattered to me then. I had carried out his last order to me.

As one of his boys for seven months I know his desire would be that we who are left mourn not, but instead take pride in what he and those that went with him did for their country, homes and loved ones. His every thought was the defeat of them that would destroy the freedom of those he loved. In this America must not-will not-fail.

I had hoped to reach your part of the country while on my leave, but circumstances prevented. I hope yet to see you again soon, depending on my next assignment. I report for duty at San Diego, (conclusion obliterated by faulty carbon paper)

FINISHED
RECORDED
INDEXED
JAN 1943
REAR JACKET

From:

To:

Date: July 21, 1942.

Subject: Lt. Com. John C. Waldron.

Before writing you I wanted to hear from (b) (6) and, now that I have his letter, the finality of the news it contains overwhelms me. But, let me quote what he said "To me, our greatest loss was John Waldron. He was one of the most capable and wide awake young officers I have ever known - most remarkable! And was loved and respected by every man and officer aboard." Those words I know are small comfort, but to know your loved one gave his all like the true hero he was, helps soften the blow. For John and his boys were truly heroes.

There have been so many changes on our "Ship" and it was with deep regret that George left her. His heart will always be with her and the valiant men aboard.

Frances Mitscher and I were in San Francisco when (b) (6) and (b) (6) arrived. Charlie to take over the ship - while Rollie returned to Florida.

These are tragic days for us, (b) (6) with almost all of our loved ones and friends in the thick of things - and where will it all end?

I know you are the brave person John would want you to be, Navy wives are like that, and I'm sure there will be a special little place in Heaven, for them as a reward for what they stand on earth.

(b) (6) asked me to send his deepest sympathy along with mine.

FINISHED FILE Registrar
SELECTION REGISTRAR FILE
(Dec 1942) BOARD JACKET

From: Rear Admiral J. H. Towers, U.S. Navy
To: Mrs. John C. Waldron
Date: July 14, 1942.
Subject: Lt. Comdr. John C. Waldron

The tragic news that your husband was missing after the recent battle in the Midway Island area has been reported to me. Even though we are fully aware of the constant peril of war, yet we are never prepared for the personal shock of learning that adversity has befallen one so near and dear to us. I fully realize your anxiety and grief and want you to know that you have my heartfelt sympathy.

It is my hope that the knowledge of your husband's loyalty and his heroic service in the defense of our country will lessen the bitterness of your suffering. His unflinching courage and devotion to duty will serve as an inspiration to all of us. His sacrifice shall not be in vain.

I wish to extend to you the deepest sympathy of the officers and men of naval aviation.

FINISH FILE REAR FILE
(Decorations)
FINISHED REGISTER
SELECTION BOARD JACKET

From: Rear Admiral M. A. Mitscher

To:

(b) (6)

Date: July 4, 1942.

Subject: Lt. Comdr. John C. Waldron

I have just received your message of June 10th, sent to me in care of the Postmaster, San Francisco, California. It was apparently forwarded from there by regular mail and I hasten to answer immediately.

I know that you will appreciate the facts and certain information rather than encouraging hopes. At the time I wrote my previous letter we were making a determined search for all personnel reported as missing. This was a very careful search and the only man picked up in the Torpedo Squadron, so gallantly led by your husband, was (b) (6)

We sent (b) (6) back to the States with the direct request that he get in touch with you, as soon as he could determine where you were, and explain to you personally just what happened that day. Also I asked him to contact some of the other officer's wives if he could so as to give them full information. From all evidence that we have, so far, it indicates that every man in Torpedo Squadron Eight was shot down at some time during their attack. Ensign Gay being the last in and the only survivor was wounded. He was exceedingly fortunate in eventually getting into his rubber boat and being picked up by a searching party plane.

I am convinced that your husband, together with his whole squadron, will prove to be one of the greatest heroes of the war. His gallant conduct, and that of the squadron under him, leaves him outstandingly the inspiration for all America. I have recommended him and every member of that great command for the Navy Medal of Honor, the highest that can be given by our Country.

I regret that I cannot give you more details of the event. You will get the whole story from (b) (6) or from myself at the end of the war.

FINISH FILE Registrar
(Decorations & Medals)
FINISHED REGISTRAR FILE
SELECTION BOARD JACKET

From: Rear Admiral W. H. P. Blandy
To: Mrs. John C. Waldron
Date: July 2, 1942
Subject: Lt. Comdr. John C. Waldron

It is with the deepest regret that I have learned that Lt. Comdr. Waldron is missing in action under circumstances which hold out little hope. I feel more than usually moved in this matter because of the very happy association of your husband with the Bureau of Ordnance in recent years.

I trust that it will help to sustain you to know that the magnificent example of courage and determination which your husband set is an inspiration to us all in our work toward victory.

In view of the many remarkable escapes that our fliers in the Pacific have already made, we hope that Lt. Comdr. Waldron will eventually be returned to the service and to you.

The officers of the Bureau of Ordnance join me in this expression of sympathy.

FINISHED REGISTRAR FILE
SELECTION BOARD JACKET
FINISH FILE Registrar)
(Decorations & Medals)

From: Commander Stanhope Ring
To: Mrs. John C. Waldron
Date: June 8, 1942
Subject: Lt. Comdr. John C. Waldron

All of us feel that we share with you in the sense of personal loss in John's disappearing. Some day I hope that I may be able to tell you more fully of the circumstances, but of this you may be sure - there isn't one of us who doesn't hope that when the time comes for us to go we may do so as gloriously as John did.

In the absence of definite news to the contrary we shall continue to pray that he may yet be found. But I do want you to know that you and the children have every reason for tremendous pride in John's achievements.

Everyone in the Group joins me in deepest sympathy to you and to John's family.

FINISH FILE Registrar
(Decorations & Medals)
FINISHED REGISTRAR FILE
SELECTION BOARD JACKET

Summary of Action:

As their Commanding Officer Captain Marc A Mitscher USN of the USS Hornet (CV-8) recommended the Medal of Honor (MOH) be awarded to all 15 pilots of Torpedo Squadron 8 (VT-8) who attacked Japanese Naval Forces north of Midway Island on June 4, 1942. Captain Mitscher stated in his after action report for the Battle of Midway (BOM) dated June 13, 1942: "This Squadron in (sic) deserving of the highest honors for finding the enemy, pressing home its attack, without fighter protection and without diverting dive bomber attacks to draw the enemy fire." In paragraph 21 he continued. "Attention is particularly invited to Enclosures (C) (Recommendations for Awards). Inasmuch as the action covered by this report was an action involving actual combat by aircraft only, as far as this vessel was concerned, and considering the strategic importance of the battle, it is urged that the awards recommended in Enclosure (C) be granted. In particular the Commanding Officer feels that the conduct of Torpedo Squadron Eight, led by an indomitable Squadron Commander, is one of the most outstanding exhibitions of personal bravery and gallantry that has ever come to his attention in the records of the past or present."

In the After Action Report for Task Force Sixteen for the BOM dated June 16, 1942 Rear Admiral Spruance stated:

"Except for the Hornet dive bombers failing to find the target on the forenoon of 4 June, all operations were conducted approximately as intended, and the work of the carrier squadrons on which the success or failure of the action depended was beyond praise. This applies particularly to the first attack made on 3 CVs about noon on 4 June which decided the action. The attacks made at this time by the torpedo squadrons, prior to the arrival of the dive bombers, was of an especially gallant nature."

As stated by Theodore Taylor in his 1954 book "The Magnificent Mitscher" Captain Mitscher wrote in Enclosure (C):

"Just prior to launching he (Lieutenant Commander Waldron) had reported to the commanding officer for final instructions and had stressed the point that his squadron was well trained and ready and that he would strike his blow at the enemy regardless of consequences. His grim determination to press home an attack against all obstacles, his foreknowledge that there was the possibility that his squadron was doomed to destruction with no chance whatever of returning safely to the carrier, impressed all present with the remarkable devotion to duty and the personal integrity of an officer whose pilots asked only that they be allowed to share in the dangers and disastrous fate sure to follow such an attack."

In a letter Rear Admiral Mitscher wrote to Lieutenant Commander Waldron's wife Adelaide on July 4, 1942 he wrote: "I am convinced that your husband, together with his whole squadron, will prove to be one of the greatest heroes of the war. His gallant conduct, and that of the squadron under him, leaves him outstandingly the inspiration for all America."

In the After Action Report for the USS Enterprise (CV-6) for the Battle of Midway (BOM) dated June 8, 1942 Captain Murray stated:

1. "The attack delivered upon enemy carriers **by the torpedo squadrons of our forces** is believed to be without parallel for determined and courageous action in the face of overwhelming odds. These crews were observed to commence their attack against heavy anti-aircraft fire from enemy carriers and supporting vessels while opposed by enemy Zero

fighters in large numbers. The enemy fighter opposition was so strong and effective that ten torpedo planes out of fourteen of Torpedo Squadron SIX did not return. It is recommended that the Navy Cross be awarded to each pilot and gunner of Torpedo Squadron SIX who participated in this bold and heroic attack.”

In August 1943, the Bureau of Naval Personnel Information Bulletin No 317 awarded the Navy Cross (Posthumously) instead of the MOH to Lieutenant Commander Waldron as detailed in the following citation:

“The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Navy Cross (Posthumously) to Lieutenant Commander John Charles Waldron (NSN: 0-58825), United States Navy, for extraordinary heroism in operations against the enemy while serving as Pilot of a carrier-based Torpedo Plane and Commanding Officer of Torpedo Squadron EIGHT (VT-8), attached to the U.S.S. HORNET (CV-8), during the “Air Battle of Midway” Against enemy Japanese forces on 4 June 1942. Grimly aware of the hazardous consequences of flying without fighter protection, and with insufficient fuel to return to his carrier, Lieutenant Commander Waldron resolutely, and with no thought of his own life, led his squadron in an effective torpedo attack against violent assaults of enemy Japanese aircraft fire. His courageous action, carried out with a gallant spirit of self-sacrifice and a conscientious devotion to the fulfillment of his mission, was a determining factor in the defeat of the enemy forces and was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.”

All the pilots of Torpedo Squadron 8 received the Navy Cross, all Posthumously, except for Ensign Gay. Additionally, due to the incredible danger every dive bomber and torpedo plane pilot from the USS Enterprise, USS Yorktown, and Midway Island faced on the morning of June 4, 1942, 80 of 83 of them also received the Navy Cross. 55 of 83 were reported Missing in Action and subsequently declared Killed In Action. However, no Medals of Honor were awarded for any action over the Japanese fleet that morning.

Admiral Mitscher’s wife Frances later stated: “Admiral Mitscher was convinced that the squadron commander knew he was going to die. The tragedy of this brought him great personal grief.” Having recommended numerous others for similar awards throughout WWII Admiral Mitscher took the downgrading of his MOH recommendation to Navy Crosses for the pilots of VT-8 as a personal defeat and for several years after the BOM he spoke harsh words about the Washington board that decided combat awards. One of the important aspects of Admiral Mitscher’s inability to personally influence the award of the MOH to the pilots of Torpedo Squadron Eight was his immediate and nearly continuous responsibilities as a senior commander in the prosecution of the war in the Pacific. First as the Commander of Patrol Wing Two in Hawaii, then as Commander Air Forces in the Solomons at Guadalcanal, and then as the Commander of the Fast-Carrier Task Force that supported every amphibious assault in the Pacific for the remainder of the war. Admiral Mitscher was simply too important to the war effort to spare the time and effort to effectively champion these awards. He was fighting a war and was not in Washington DC where such things were decided. Additionally, information on the details of VT-8’s demise and the battle-determining importance of Lieutenant Commander Waldron’s actions and leadership, were not available for years after Admiral Mitscher’s early death in early 1947.

The purpose of this summary of action is to fully document the complete history of the actions taken by Lieutenant Commander Waldron over a period of nine months, from September 2, 1941 to June 4, 1942 that led 20 pilots of VT-8 to follow him and his designated subordinates in the attack of an overwhelming force, without fighter support, or any other diverting forces, in two separate engagements on June 4, 1942. As will be shown in this SOA the effect of Lieutenant Commander Waldron's leadership and his squadron's actions on June 4, 1942 had such a determining factor on victory at Midway that the award of a MOH is the only acceptable award. Furthermore, the strategic importance of the victory at Midway cannot be understated. Without the tactical contributions of Torpedo Squadron Eight at Midway it is likely the US Navy would have lost several additional aircraft carriers, ships, aircraft, and the Island of Midway. The Japanese plan was to use the seizure of Midway and the destruction of the remaining US Navy aircraft carriers as a springboard for the invasion of Hawaii. This would have greatly increased the length of the war in the Pacific with hundreds of thousands of additional casualties on both sides.

Preliminary Actions

It is important to understand the difficulties and challenges associated with what Lieutenant Commander Waldron did during those nine months. He received his wings in 1927. He flew with torpedo, scouting, observation, fighting, and patrol squadrons before taking command of the newly commissioned Torpedo Squadron Eight on September 2, 1941. VT-8 was part of the newly formed USS Hornet Air Group (HAG). The Hornet was commissioned on October 20, 1941 and spent much of the next few months on various shakedown cruises which did not allow significant flight operations with its air wing. The squadron did not receive its first aircraft until September 28, 1941. Twelve more aircraft were on hand by the end of October. These aircraft included SBN scouting and TBD torpedo planes. Both types were already considered obsolete. In November Ensign Langdon was killed conducting carrier landings on the USS Long Island when the engine of his SBN quit. Lieutenant Commander Waldron went to Washington, DC to complain about these aircraft and within three days the SBNs were withdrawn from service. New pilots fresh from flight school in Pensacola were also arriving. Aware of the TBDs shortcomings Lieutenant Commander Waldron drove the pilots of his squadron to prepare them for war which came on December 7, 1941. Due to peacetime budget limitations and their cost, the US Navy was not allowed to use practice or real torpedoes to train their carrier pilots in the art of taking off from a carrier and launching them against practice targets. Lieutenant Commander Waldron taught them these skills and low-level torpedo-launching tactics as best he could. They mastered formation flying and high-level bombing. Without an aircraft carrier to practice with, they flew day and night "bounce" drills to simulate landing on the Hornet.

Lieutenant Commander Waldron tirelessly railed at the Navy chain of command about the squadron's inadequate equipment, underpowered aircraft, and the failure to supply him with practice torpedoes. The actual torpedo he was to use, the Mark 13, had a maximum speed of 33.5 knots and a range of only 6300 yards. The Japanese carriers VT6 would see at the BOM had maximum speeds of: Hiryu and Soryu 34 knots, Akagi 31.5 knots, and Kaga 28 knots. These considerations were successfully employed by the Commanders of the Japanese carriers in the tactics they used against the US Navy torpedo squadrons during the battle. The other deficiencies of the Mark 13 included circular or erratic runs, broaching or running too deep, and failure to detonate. The requirements for a successful torpedo drop in 1942 limited the height and speed of the aircraft to 120 feet and 100 mph, making the aircraft a sitting duck for enemy fighter aircraft and/or anti-aircraft fire. In a 1940 fleet gunnery exercise four of ten

torpedoes sank and were never seen again, while five more ran erratically. The 10 percent success rate mirrored actual wartime results from February to June 1942 during 11 squadron strength attacks that yielded less than 10 possible hits from 95 known drops. Due to reporting difficulties the number of actual hits and detonations may be even lower. The problems with these torpedoes were well known within the fleet, and yet senior Navy leadership took no action before the war to fix the problems. The Mark 13 was all they had on the morning of June 4th. Similar problems plagued the submarine launched version of this torpedo. Initially the high miss rate was blamed on the ineptitude of the operators. Eventually senior leadership reported these problems and this finally caused the Bureau of Ordnance to investigate and redesign both torpedoes. By comparison, the Japanese Type 91 Mod 2 aerial torpedo displayed none of these issues, had a speed of 42 knots, and could be successfully dropped by an aircraft at 235 mph. The Mark 13 torpedo was matched to an obsolete delivery mechanism: the TBD Devastator.

When designed in 1934 the TBD Devastator was a state-of-the-art aircraft. By 1941 it was far eclipsed by its counterpart, the Japanese B5N Kate. The TBD's crew consisted of pilot, bombardier, and radioman gunner. The bombardier did not fly torpedo attack missions. It featured a 30-caliber machinegun fired by the pilot and a centerline 360 degree firing machinegun operated by the radioman gunner. Only 130 were produced. 30 TBDs were lost between initial deliveries in October 1937 and December 1941. The remaining 100 were distributed between seven aircraft carriers and several bases around the Atlantic and Pacific. Due to a shortage of aircraft in the fleet the aircraft were overused and tired. Tactical range with the 2200-pound Mark 13 torpedo was supposedly 435 miles but by 1942 the aircraft never flew and successfully returned from a strike of more than 200 miles. The maximum speed of the TBD was supposedly 206 mph, but the aircraft rarely achieved this speed, even in a dive. The maximum speed of the much more maneuverable Kate was 228 mph. When the floatation airbags, meant to allow time for the crew to safely evacuate the aircraft in the case of a water landing, inflated accidentally during flight and caused an aircraft to crash, Lieutenant Commander Waldron ripped the rest of them out of the remaining aircraft. The aircraft as-built had no armor to protect the crew or self-sealing fuel tanks. These fuel tanks were highly combustible if hit by tracer or cannon fire. These problems and the inherent dangers of torpedo attack were well known from the most junior to the most senior officers. However, none of the commanders could justify sparing the VT squadrons from torpedo attacks against the enemy at this point in the war; it was all hands-on-deck.

Thanks to Waldron's constant hectoring VT-8 was selected to be the first torpedo squadron to be equipped with the Navy's brand-new torpedo bomber, the TBF Avenger. The TBF was more maneuverable and 72 mph faster than the TBD, had steel armor plating to protect the crew, self-sealing fuel tanks that virtually swallowed bullets without burning or exploding, had a motorized swiveling turret for a fifty-caliber machine gun, a forward firing machine gun and a third machine gun operated by the radioman underneath the plane's tail section. On March 7, 1942, the USS Hornet took aboard her Air Wing and left Norfolk for the Panama Canal and service in the Pacific. VT-8 was divided in half. Fifteen pilots with aircrew and 10 TBDs with Lieutenant Commander Waldron departed with the Hornet. The remaining pilots and aircrew, along with the squadron Executive Officer remained in Norfolk awaiting delivery of the first 21 TBF Avengers from the Grumman assembly line in Bethpage, NY. The plan was for these pilots to accept delivery of the TBFs and then fly across country to meet up with the Hornet and replace the TBDs before Hornet sailed from the west coast for war.

The Hornet's departure from Norfolk and relatively rapid transit to and through the Panama Canal did not allow for much additional air crew training. On March 12, 1942, the Hornet departed Balboa for San Diego. On March 20th the Hornet arrived at San Diego. On March 23rd, the Hornet put to sea for several days to conduct carrier qualifications for newly trained Aircraft Carrier Training Group (ACTG) pilots. While in San Diego VT-8 drew an additional two TBDs from the Fleet pool. On March 30, 1942, the Hornet departed San Diego for San Francisco. On April 1, 1942 tugs towed the Hornet to Alameda Naval Air Station where all the Hornet's Air Group aircraft were moved to the hangar bay and the 16 B-25 bombers of LtCol Doolittle's raiders were hoisted to the flight deck. All the TBDs were disassembled to make room for other aircraft. On April 2, 1942, the Hornet departed San Francisco on its mission to deliver the B-25s to a point 450 miles from Tokyo. No Hornet aircraft would be able to fly until after the B-25s were launched on April 18, 1942.

During this extended period of flying inactivity Lieutenant Commander Waldron did everything he could to maintain the combat readiness of his squadron. Every morning the squadron would fall out for physical training on the flight deck and be the subject of derision from the other aviators onboard the USS Hornet. He hammered his pilots on teamwork and coordinated attack, takeoff, and landing procedures. Unable to conduct actual simulated torpedo takeoffs and attacks he led his pilots through hours of tactical discussions to build up their confidence that they would be able to do the real thing when required. He demanded the pilots, radiomen, and gunners know their jobs blindfolded. Unhappy with the lack of armor on the TBDs he modified them by adding armor to the pilot's seats and seat backs. When he became aware of the fact that the standard issue pistol holster carried by every pilot created a problem with the modified seats, he directed the manufacture of leather shoulder holsters for their 45 caliber pistols and survival knives.

After the Doolittle raid the Hornet was able to move its aircraft out of the hanger bay. It took several days to reassemble the TBDs. The Hornet arrived at Pearl Harbor on April 25, 1942. On April 30th, the Hornet departed Pearl Harbor for the Coral Sea but did not arrive in time to participate in the Battle of the Coral Sea. Due to the nature of this deployment opportunities for tactical training were not possible. Localized anti-submarine patrols and some training was conducted. The Hornet returned to Pearl Harbor on May 26, 1942. Upon arrival at Pearl Harbor Lieutenant Commander Waldron laid siege to the Aircraft Material office. He had heard they had a supply of the newly designed twin 30 caliber machine-gun mounts used aboard the SBD dive bombers. This would vastly improve the current firepower of his TBDs. His impassioned plea succeeded, and he got one for every TBD. Before departing for Midway on May 28th VT-8 drew three additional TBDs and three new pilots, none yet qualified for carrier landings in the TBD.

One of these new pilots, Ensign Mears, only knew the other pilots of VT-8 for a week but made the following observations. "They were knit together as a unit, almost as a family, by the long hours of training under their skipper. They all knew each other well. Waldron gave to the squadron that special character of aggressiveness and earnestness in training which so distinguished it from other squadrons of the fleet. The motto of these torpedo-men was 'Attack'-that and nothing more- and the squadron insignia, a closed fist. Everything Waldron did was toward the one aim of preparing the pilots for this purpose. In training at Norfolk, he flew them six to eight hours a day. He made them learn things about their planes that pilots had never learned before- how to make engine changes, how to take off a flipper and set a new one, how to load a torpedo, and how the hydraulic system worked. * He gave lecture after lecture on torpedo plane tactics and explained how a well-planned and firmly executed attack

could not fail to drive home several fish. Then about the time the boys began to say, 'Oh, to hell with it.' and think there couldn't be any sense to working so hard, Waldron threw a big party for them at his home. Even at these parties Waldron never forgot his goal, and when he was feeling his wine he gathered the boys around and told them some of his plans for attacking. Waldron watched the morale of his pilots like an anxious father. He had molded that group of men by his own determination and singleness of purpose, and he was their leader if anyone ever was a leader. Nobody in the squadron ever called him anything but 'Skipper' or 'Captain,' and no one ever thought of him in any other terms. He had no nickname. The Skipper looked like an Indian chief, and several members of the squadron told me that part of the blood raging through his veins was of these first Americans. He was middle-aged but still lean and hard. Waldron commands the respect of every man in the squadron. He is lean and brown, with the keen eyes and firm mouth of a professional fighting man. He takes care of his men and is continually on the lookout for their welfare. He is well liked for his wry sense of humor. Most important of all, he has a gallant fighting spirit and knows his job thoroughly. The Skipper has studied the science of torpedo plane warfare to the minutest detail and has indoctrinated all his regular pilots with his knowledge. Waldron has lost no time in attempting to familiarize the three of us with his methods, and we spend hour upon hour in the ready room trying to catch up on the groundwork the other pilots have acquired during months of training in the States." What professional could wish for a more perfect obituary than this, written by one soon-to-be-dead pilot, Mears, for his commander already dead in battle.

Lieutenant Commander Waldron's squadron parties were legendary. He would put aside his toughness to entertain the young ensigns and sometimes allowed a deep streak of tenderness to shine through. One night he took two of them to a darkened room where his children were sleeping and said: "Cookie, you and Morgan look in this room. Did you ever see such pretty little girls?"

During the six days after leaving Pearl Harbor the pilots of the Hornet received intelligence briefings on the upcoming battle. The US Navy was reading the Japanese Naval code. The news was not good. Three American aircraft carriers, eight cruisers, and 15 destroyers would be opposed by nearly the entire Japanese Combined Fleet that included four of their largest, most capable, aircraft carriers featuring the cream of their best pilots and aircrews, four light aircraft carriers, 10 battleships, 13 heavy and 11 light cruisers, 66 destroyers, 20 submarines, and 60 other auxiliary ships. The American plan was to deliver surprise carrier attacks on the Japanese flanks after the Japanese aircraft raided Midway Island. To minimize the chance that spurious radio communications would give away the American carrier's presence, most flight operations during this period were limited to short range anti-submarine and search missions. Bad weather cancelled flight operations for three of the days.

Although the USS Yorktown's and USS Lexington's After-Action Reports from the Battle of the Coral Sea had not been officially circulated, Waldron and the other squadron commanders knew the air groups on the Yorktown and the Lexington had divided their fighter strength during the two-day battle. Half of the fighters had flown cover for the slow-moving torpedo planes, and the other half had protected the carrier's dive bombers from attacks from the Japanese Zeros. On May 8 only four fighters successfully held off a swarm of Zeros allowing VT-5 to launch nine torpedoes, claiming three hits. Over the two-day battle, with the fighter escorts keeping the Zeros busy, all but one of the vulnerable Devastators made it back to their ships.

On May 31st a meeting was held with Captain Mitscher, the Hornet's Air Officer Commander Soucek, the Commander of the Hornet Air Group (CHAG) Commander Ring, the four squadron commanders and their flight officers. Lieutenant Commander Waldron requested close fighter support for his vulnerable TBDs. Commander Ring and the two fighter squadron representatives strongly advised Captain Mitscher that some of the fighters provide close escort to VT-8. Despite the information on Coral Sea and these requests Captain Mitscher decided to keep the 10 fighters together as a unit and they would stay at eighteen thousand feet to protect the dive bombers.

After another intelligence briefing on June 3rd the squadron commanders, CHAG, and the Hornet's Air Staff met again. Lieutenant Commander Waldron again made his case for giving his squadron some fighter protection. Lieutenant Commander Mitchell, the CO of the fighter squadron backed Waldron. Captain Mitscher made the final decision: the fighters would stay with the dive bombers. Torpedo 8 was deeply disappointed over the lack of direct fighter protection. Not fooled by rosy estimates, Waldron had no illusions as to the vulnerability of his Devastators. If the Wildcat fighters faced a disadvantage fighting the nimble Zeros at low altitude, what chance had his clumsy and slow TBDs? Waldron carefully explained to his crews the reasons why they would not have fighter protection, but that did not make the dose any easier to take. He observed that the dive bombers might draw many Zeros away, as they with their faster cruise would arrive in the target area first but he added: "However as you can well see this is not the same kind of protection which would be afforded VT if adequate VF could be supplied to go in with the VT and whose sole mission it was to see to it that nobody interfered with VT until they could drop their pickles. Therefore you pilots and you gunners must be prepared to shoot it out with the Japs. Be prepared this time for all their VF to jump on VT," a tragically prophetic statement. In the VT-8 ready room Lieutenant Commander Waldron issued a one-page mimeograph to each of his pilots. It said:

"Just a word to let you know how I feel. We are all ready. We have had a very short time to train, and we have worked under the most extreme difficulties. But we have truly done the best humanly possible. I actually believe that under these conditions, we are the best in the world. My greatest hope is that we encounter a favorable tactical situation, but if we don't and worst comes to worst, I want each of us to do his utmost to destroy our enemies. If there is only one plane left to make the final run-in, I want that man to go in and get a hit. May God be with us all. Good luck, happy landings, and give 'em hell."

On the eve of the battle Lieutenant Commander Waldron also recommended his pilots tidy up their personal affairs and write a letter home to their families. Most did.

VT-8 TBF Detachment

After accepting and breaking in their new aircraft the VT-8 TBF detachment lead by Lieutenant Larson was ordered to fly their 21 aircraft from Norfolk to San Francisco on May 8, 1942. After arriving in San Francisco these aircraft were disassembled and loaded on a transport ship over a three-day period. The transport then sailed for Hawaii, arriving on May 29, 1942; one day too late to join the USS Hornet when it departed Pearl Harbor for the BOM. During the next two days these aircraft were unloaded, reassembled, and made ready for action. Around midday May 31, 1942 Lieutenant Larson was directed to prepare six TBFs for the twelve-hundred-mile flight to Midway. In record setting time the planes were equipped with the belly fuel tanks needed to make it. Each was taken to the end of the runway and rotated 360 degrees to insure proper calibration of their magnetic compasses. Engines, electronics,

and hydraulic systems were checked. Lieutenant Larson was upset Admiral Noyes would not allow him to lead the mission, so he selected his second-in-command, Lieutenant Fieberling to take the detachment and to select five volunteers for the mission. Such was the level of morale and dedication in VT-8 that all the pilots of the TBF Detachment volunteered for the mission. Lieutenant Larson then selected the five that would go with Lieutenant Fieberling. At the time it was the longest duration overwater flight of a formation of single engine aircraft. Lieutenant Larson requested two Patrol Plane navigators be assigned to accompany the detachment to ensure it arrived at Midway. At least one of the pilots, Ensign Earnest, had less than 90 hours in a TBF and had never flown out of sight of land before this flight.

The Midway Detachment of VT-8 departed Pearl Harbor at 0700 on June 1, 1942 arriving without incident at Midway eight hours later. Upon landing Lieutenant Fieberling requested ground crews remove the extra fuel tanks and replace them with torpedoes. He then reported to the Commanding Officer of Marine Air Group 22 for duty.

June 4, 1942

At 0430 on June 4, 1942 the Japanese carriers launched 108 aircraft to attack Midway Island. At 0534 the American carriers heard a voice radio report from a Midway based patrol plane. "Enemy carriers." Another patrol plane reported "Many planes heading Midway." Sitting with his pilots in the VT-8 ready room Lieutenant Commander Waldron said: "It's almost dawn. This is when they will attack." At 0552 a patrol plane reported two carriers and battleships course 135, speed 25 knots, bearing 247 degrees 180 miles from the American carriers. This location placed the Japanese fleet outside of the maximum combat range of the TBDs and fighters. Unknown at the time, and due to an error in navigation by the patrol plane crew, the Japanese were actually 220 miles from the American carriers. Consequently, the American ships attempted to close the distance by heading towards this sighting and increasing speed to 25 knots. On Midway all available attack planes were scrambled and directed toward the Japanese, to include the six TBFs of the VT-8 detachment. None of the 26 Marine fighters on Midway accompanied the attack planes but instead intercepted the incoming Japanese aircraft, where they were slaughtered by the more maneuverable Zeros that were flown by vastly more experienced Japanese pilots.

Aboard the USS Enterprise Admiral Spruance made the decision to launch the Enterprise and Hornet Air Groups at 0700 at would have been maximum range for the TBDs and fighters. Standing at the front of the ready room Lieutenant Commander Waldron gave his pilots their final instructions, telling them he thought the Japanese carrier task forces would swing together and retire just far enough so they could retrieve their planes from the first strike. He told them not to worry about navigating, just to follow him. "Maybe it's the Sioux in me (Waldron was 1/8th Sioux) but I have a hunch the Japanese ships will be in a different position than our reports have them. I won't hesitate to run this squadron dry of gas in an effort to find them. In that case, we'll all sit down in the water together and have a nice little picnic." There was a moment of silence and Waldron said "God-speed" and the announcement came: "Pilots, man all planes."

Soon after an announcement was made for all squadron commanders to report to the bridge. The first to arrive was Lieutenant Commander Mitchell from VF-8. Without preamble, he requested his squadron be assigned to fly cover for the TBDs. Not just half, but all 10 fighters. Without a pause Captain Mitscher shook his head and told Mitchell he would stay with the dive bombers. His decision was final. With the assembled group that included Commander Soucek the Air Officer, his operations officer,

Lieutenant Commander Foster, and the bridge watch officers Commander Ring said he was planning to fly course 265 degrees, almost due west and 25 degrees to the north of the Japanese fleet's last reported position, 240 degrees southwest! Lieutenant Commander Waldron immediately disagreed. He proposed 247 degrees, which considered the last fleet sighting, as well as the possibility the Japanese had swung back to the north after launching their first strike. In response Mitscher told Waldron and all the others to follow the course Ring had given them. The Hornet and Enterprise started launching their aircraft.

At 0702 the first aircraft from Midway, the six TBFs of the VT-8 Detachment, began their attack on the Japanese Fleet. Assaulted by 28 Japanese Zeros well outside the Japanese screening vessels Lieutenant Fieberling led them in an attack on the Hiryu. One TBF was immediately disabled, the pilot fearing he was about crash turned towards a light cruiser and fired his torpedo. Bracing for impact the wounded pilot discovered he could still fly the aircraft using his trim tabs. With a dead ball turret gunner, a dead or unconscious radioman, no hydraulics, most of his controls, to include his compass, shot away and over 70 bullet and 20 mm cannon holes in his aircraft he was the only TBF to return to Midway island. Like the other five pilots, who earned them posthumously, Ensign Earnest was awarded the Navy Cross for this attack. He was given a second Navy Cross for successfully piloting the stricken TBF to Midway. This enabled the first TBF off the production line to be evaluated for battle damage by engineers. Immediately after this attack four Army B-26 bombers also torpedo attacked the Akagi. Two of those aircraft were also shot down by the Zeros, the others were able to return to Midway but never flew again due to battle damage. Admiral Kusaka, who witnessed these attacks from Akagi, was impressed by the steadfast courage of all these pilots. He had thought only Japanese pilots did things like that. Admiral Nagumo, the commander of the Japanese carrier force, was impressed by the attack of the American torpedo planes. The decadent Americans were not supposed to fight like this. Based upon the concern that similar future attacks from Midway might be successful he made a fateful decision to remove the torpedoes and anti-ship bombs from his reserve aircraft and to rearm them with more effective "land" bombs for a second attack on Midway.

Task Force 16

The Hornets' fighters and bombers took off first. While the bombers and fighters climbed to altitude over the task force the 15 torpedo planes took off. By 0806 they completed their launch and the entire air group departed on course 265. At 0816 Lieutenant Commander Waldron broke radio silence to tell Commander Ring they were going the wrong direction. He said: "You're going the wrong direction for the Japanese carrier force." Angrily Ring replied: "I am leading this flight. You fly with us right here." Waldron replied: "I know where the damned Jap fleet is." Ring responded: "You fly on us. I'm leading this formation; you fly on us." There was a brief silence and Waldron replied: "Well the hell with you. I know where they are, and I am going to them." Three miles below, Waldron lead his squadron in a gentle turn to the left (south). It was 0825. As it turned out Waldron was correct in his navigation and sense of what the Japanese would do. VT-8 was the only Hornet squadron that found the Japanese fleet on the morning of June 4th. Commander Ring's fruitless search resulted in the failure of one third of the strike force missing the Japanese fleet and all 10 fighters and three SBDs running out of fuel and ditching.

At 0917 Lieutenant Commander Waldron saw the wispy smoke columns from ships dead ahead. He attempted to contact Commander Ring to report he had found the enemy. There was no response.

Waldron left his radio on very likely in the hope someone would pick up the radio chatter and use it to locate the target. Waldron had no good options. He could not attack according to doctrine, for there were no dive bombers for him to cooperate with. He could not circle and wait for them; the Zeros would shoot down all his planes and he already was concerned they would run out of fuel anyway. There was only one option. Waldron then told his own men: "We will go in; we won't turn back. Former strategy (of a coordinated attack) cannot be used. We will attack. Good luck." He put his nose down and began a gradual dive to 500 feet. The rest of the squadron followed him down. Soon after that 24 Zeros assaulted them. Onboard the bridge of the Akagi Commander Genda thought it was sheer idiocy for them to attack without fighter protection.

VT-8 approached the Japanese fleet from the southeast so the Japanese carriers fled at high speed to the northwest. This presented a narrower target and lengthened the time it took for the 110 knot TBDs to reach a satisfactory position for their torpedo drops. A drop from any aft angle, and the ability of the slower torpedo to catch up to the target before it exhausted its fuel, spelled failure. For success VT-8 had to work his way around to the front of the carriers to attack from bow angles.

Lieutenant Commander Waldron aimed for the nearest carrier, the Soryu, but the rate of closure was agonizingly slow. TBDs at 110 knots chasing a carrier making 34 knots. The Japanese fighter pilots demonstrated skill and determination in working over the hapless TBDs. The range closed with agonizing slowness, a mile and a half each minute, as the enemy tracers smoked by, holing wings, slowing engines, wounding, killing. For the gunners facing aft over their twin 30-calibers, there was a sky full of olive-drab fighters which dived in fast from behind, guns winking along the wings, and flashed by close up, banking sharply for reattacks.

At eight miles black puffs of anti-aircraft fire began to appear in the clear air around Waldron's harried squadron, and the planes jarred and shook with the bursting shells. The pilots twisted and wove, climbing and diving under the fire of planes and ships, but always pressing in. Initially there were two Zeros for every Devastator but as the TBDs started to fall the odds grew even worse. As the range closed, medium and light anti-aircraft machine guns from the escorting battleships, cruisers, and destroyers opened up. **One TBD exploded spectacularly when a 20 mm cannon shell detonated its torpedo.** One after another the other Devastators slid, cartwheeled, or dived into the sea as fighter bullets found the engines, or the controls, or the gas tanks, or the pilots. Splotches of skidding orange flame and black smoke, long tearing splashes, and an occasional slowly tumbling wing tip with a white star, appeared on the approaches to the port side of the still turning Kaga. The Japanese focused initially on the leading aircraft to decapitate the squadron's leadership in the hopes that this would breakup or deter the remaining aircraft. Consequently, Lieutenant Commander Waldron's plane was one of the first to spout flames and head for the water. Waldron was last seen standing up in his cockpit the flames engulfing him.

When half of the fifteen aircraft had been destroyed, no one would have blamed the remaining pilots for jettisoning their torpedoes in the unequal fight and attempting to shoot their way out and home. Such was the leadership of Lieutenant Commander Waldron that none did. Finally, a wounded Ensign Gay, with a wounded or dead radioman-gunner, was the only remaining aircraft. At 800 yards Ensign Gay launched his torpedo at the Soryu and was finally able to take evasive action. Losing sight of the torpedo he flew directly over the carrier's flight deck and then over the stern. The Zeros caught up with him again and shot him down. Ensign Gay was the only survivor of the 30 VT-8 aircrew. It was all over

by 0940. Ensign Gay's torpedo missed but the entire area around the Japanese fleet was covered with the smoke of many ships maneuvering at high speed to avoid VT-8, smoke screens thrown up by Japanese ships to conceal or shield their aircraft carriers, and the black puffs of anti-aircraft fire. Many of the Zeros were now low on ammunition, especially the deadly explosive 20 mm cannon rounds, or low on fuel and needed to return to their carriers. It is believed some of the Zeros fell to the guns of the radiomen. Below decks the rearming of aircraft had to be suspended while all the carriers made radical high speed evasive maneuvers, thereby delaying the planned Japanese strike on the recently discovered American carriers.

The 14 TBDs of VT-6 from the USS Enterprise were next. Having lost contact with the rest of their air group they plodded on course 240. At 0940 they detected the smoke caused by VT-8's attack and adjusted their heading to the right (west) to attack the Japanese fleet. Starting about 15 miles out the Zeros began their deadly attacks. Again, no TBDs turned back. Again, the Japanese carriers turned away from the incoming TBDs. At 0958 the five remaining TBDs launched their torpedoes 500-800 yards away from the Akagi and Kaga, but the attack angles were bad and the anti-aircraft fire heavy. Adroit shiphandling by these carriers, and the unreliable torpedoes assured no hits. The five surviving TBDs cleared the hell of the Japanese fleet. It was all over by 1000. One TBD ditched before the bullet-riddled others were able to return to the Enterprise. Of the four that landed, one was so irreparably damaged it was immediately pushed over the side. Again, the Japanese fleet was covered with the smoke of combat and the rearming of the strike aircraft was negatively affected by the radical maneuvering of the ships. Respotting of the strike aircraft from the hangar deck to the flight deck could not happen as the flight deck was dedicated to landing, servicing, and relaunching the Zeros. Both torpedo squadron attacks had focused all the Japanese Combat Air Patrol (CAP) at low altitude, which set the stage for the next portion of the battle.

The 12 TBDs of VT-3 from the USS Yorktown were next. The Yorktown's Air Group was slightly more experienced and bloodied than the other American carriers. Having launched last, the Air Group stayed together enroute to the Japanese fleet. At 1003 VT-3 spotted the smoke from the VT-6 attack and altered course to the right (west). Noticing this, the dive bombers at altitude altered their course accordingly. Unlike the other torpedo squadrons VT-3 was escorted by six fighters. Approximately 14-18 miles from the Japanese carriers the first two Zeros hit. Dozens followed. Again, the Japanese carriers turned away from the torpedo planes. VT-3s fighter support was overwhelmed and had to fight for their lives, but this reduced the number of Zeros attacking VT-3. By 1040 it was over. 10 of the 12 TBDs were shot down attacking the Hiryu, the others were so damaged they were forced to ditch on their way back to the Yorktown. No hits were scored. None had turned back. However, the Japanese CAP were all down low, focused on the TBDs and fighters. Rearming and respotting the Japanese flight decks for their planned strike on the American carriers again suffered due to the violent maneuvering of the ships.

Unnoticed, at 1020 the dive bombers of the USS Yorktown began their attack on the Soryu. At the same time, the dive bombers of the USS Enterprise, having finally found the Japanese fleet, began their attacks on the Akagi and Kaga. Unmolested by any Japanese fighters until they pulled out of their dives, the dive bombers had free rein. In five minutes, the flight decks and hangar bays of these three carriers were exploding from bombs dropped by the dive bombers. The American bombs exploded the bombs and torpedoes on the Japanese aircraft and the ordnance that had been removed from the aircraft but had not been moved back to the magazines due to the chaos of the American torpedo bomber attacks.

Each carrier would sink within the next 24 hours. Although planes from the Hiryu would force the abandonment and eventual demise of the Yorktown, the Hiryu would be left a smoldering hulk by a second attack from the dive bombers later that day.

Undeniable Facts and the Role VT-8 Performed in Victory

The American victory at Midway was the turning point in the war. Until Midway the Japanese were on the offensive, after Midway they were on defense for the remainder of the war. At the time the Navy's awards board downgraded the recommendation of the Medal of Honor to a Navy Cross for Lieutenant Commander Waldron and his squadron, much of the historical information that is now available was not known. It is unlikely he was notified of this decision and given the opportunity to rebut it. VT-8 was one of several squadrons where many heroes of the battle gallantly gave their lives and were posthumously awarded the Navy Cross. Of the 100 aircrew assigned to US Navy torpedo bombers, 86 perished. A majority of the remaining were wounded. If he had survived, Lieutenant Commander Waldron would probably have balked from the award of the MOH. Since then, the testimony of hundreds of witnesses on both sides resulted in approximately 20 books and hundreds of articles that have dissected every aspect of the battle. There are two general points to be addressed here. The first are the facts and results of the battle no historian would disagree with. The second set of judgements are accepted by most, but not all historians, as to the pivotal role VT-8 played in the victory.

Under the inspired leadership of Lieutenant Commander Waldron Torpedo Squadron 8 went from a concept to a fully capable combat unit in nine months. This was all done under the most difficult circumstances possible. Modern day Naval Officers should fully appreciate this achievement. Together with precious few experienced subordinates (none of whom had seen combat either), Waldron molded a group of fledgling aviators into a unit that would follow him and Lieutenant Fieberling to their deaths. His men knew Waldron would fight for every conceivable advantage for his squadron. Men who had never taken off the deck of an aircraft carrier with a torpedo, much less made a torpedo attack into the jaws of overwhelming enemy forces, never hesitated, or turned back. Men who had not gone through the formal process of "carrier-quals" never hesitated to make their first carrier landings as part of normal carrier operations because there was no time for such formal qualification. Such was the elan Waldron had created in his squadron.

The first American force that attacked the Japanese carriers, the VT-8 TBF Detachment, attacked with such bravado that Admiral Nagumo decided he needed to eliminate the threat of additional Midway based aircraft and ordered the rearming of his reserve aircraft. Later, when Japanese scouts reported the presence of US Navy forces on his flank, he countermanded this order. The result of this change was he could not immediately launch his reserve against the American fleet and the presence of large amounts of ordnance in their hanger bays that the Japanese did not have the time to return to their magazines.

The TBD, and even the newer TBF, could not survive an extended engagement against superior numbers of Zeros without fighter support. Lieutenant Commander Waldron and the other squadron commanders on the USS Hornet knew this but, despite their numerous requests, Captain Mitscher decided to send the limited number of fighters with the Hornet's dive bombers. This decision haunted Mitscher for the rest of his days.

Captain Mitscher also reported that the Japanese task force was calculated to bear 239 degrees from Hornet but it did not specify the direction the HAG took upon departure. A map detailing the track of the HAG has since been deemed to be inaccurate by a number of experts. Contrary to U.S. Navy regulations, Captain Mitscher did not forward the required After Action Reports from the three surviving squadron commanders as enclosures to his report. In paragraph 1 of his After Action Report Rear Admiral Spruance stated "Where discrepancies exist between Enterprise and Hornet reports, the Enterprise report should be taken as the more accurate."

Based upon the reported location of the Japanese fleet and the known location of the American carriers Lieutenant Commander Waldron's navigational solution to find the Japanese carriers was the same solution of every other pilot or squadron commander on the Hornet, other than Commander Ring and Admiral Mitscher. His solution was also closer to the azimuth the Enterprise and Yorktown attack groups took when they departed. Although some historians will point to individual accounts that contradict this, the vast bulk of the testimony and evidence indicates the Hornet Air Group did depart on course 265. This is also confirmed by the account of Lieutenant Commander Foster who watched the Air Group on radar depart on course 265. This would have placed them well north of the Japanese fleet before their formation dissolved as individuals and units decided to leave Commander Ring and take their own course back to the Hornet or Midway when their gas gauges forced them to make that decision. It is believed, but not known, the reason the HAG departed on course 265 was because Captain Mitscher suspected two of the Japanese carriers were not collocated with the other two and were operating several miles behind (north) the initially reported two carriers. Lieutenant Commander Waldron attempted to get Admiral Mitscher to agree to his solution before he left the Hornet. Before departing the initial track of the Hornet Air Group, he tried to get Commander Ring to modify his course also. Multiple Hornet Air Group pilots observed VT-8 made a gentle left turn when they departed, not a right turn. This is consistent with a 265 azimuth for the HAG and a 247 azimuth for VT-8. After the war Japanese ship logs and navigational information supported the location of the Japanese fleet in relation to these two azimuths and the courses flown by all the American aircraft.

The information on the attacks of VT-6 and VT-3 was included to show the losses and results from these similar attacks were also grievous, and only mitigated somewhat by the fact that, once VT-8 had attacked, some of the Zeros had to return for ammunition and fuel. Additionally, VT-3 had some fighter support. More importantly the constant need to land, service and launch the Zeros to defend their carriers precluded respotting these flight decks with the rearmed strike force, thereby saving the American carriers from enduring a major attack.

The timing and sequence of the almost continuous American torpedo squadron attacks resulted in all the Japanese Zeros being at low altitude when the American dive bombers arrived. This allowed the dive bombers to attack without opposition or losses, greatly improving their accuracy and chances for success.

There are several important decisions made by the respective American or Japanese commanders that led to the events that made victory at Midway possible for the United States. It can be strongly argued the single most important event that determined the battle's outcome was Lieutenant Commander Waldron's decision to depart the Hornet Air Group. If Waldron had not found the Japanese fleet and the rest of the HAG had, he would have had to accept the consequences of his actions, but he and his squadron were certain to have survived. If Waldron found the Japanese fleet, he was committing his

force to an unsupported attack with the likely result being the annihilation of his squadron. He chose the more career jeopardizing and vastly more perilous course of action. To do otherwise would violate his code of honor and ethics. If VT-8 had not attacked the Japanese fleet, VT-6 would not have seen the smoke from this engagement. If VT-6 had not then made their attack, VT-3 would not have seen the smoke from that engagement, and it is likely none of the Yorktown Air Group would have found the Japanese carriers. This would have resulted in the survival of the carrier Soryu. It can be assumed Lieutenant Commander McClusky's Enterprise dive bombers would have still found the Japanese carriers as they did. However, had the torpedo bombers not impacted the amount, effectiveness, or location of the Japanese CAP, McClusky's attack might have failed or been severely impacted by the CAP resulting in the survival of the Kaga and/or the Akagi.

In summary, while it can be argued that the pilot of every torpedo plane that attacked the Japanese fleet at Midway met the criteria for the MOH:

- a. Displayed conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his or her own life above and beyond the call of duty.
- b. While engaged in action against an enemy of the United States.
- c. There being no margin of doubt or possibility of error in awarding this award.
- d. That the act must be so outstanding that it clearly distinguishes the award's gallantry above all lesser forms of bravery.
- e. That the award is inherently credit for Extraordinary Heroism (EH) in the line of duty per Tab 17 of Appendix 17 to SECNAV M-1650.1.

The efforts and impacts of Lieutenant Commander Waldron actions far exceed the efforts and import of any of the others, excepting the Commanding Officers of Torpedo Squadron Three and Torpedo Squadron Six, which will be addressed by separate correspondence. The fact his cumulative efforts resulted in the same level of award as all the others (Navy Cross) can, and should be, corrected.

That the award of the MOH would go a long way toward realizing Admiral Mitscher's words in his letter to Adelaide Waldron: "your husband, together with his whole squadron, will prove to be one of the greatest heroes of the war."

*For the surviving members of VT-8 these skills would be put to the test later in the war when the squadron was put ashore at Henderson Field on Guadalcanal under the most rudimentary and primitive conditions.

WALDRON, John C. MISSING ~~7096~~ Lt. Comdr. USN

USS HORNET - VT 8

58825

Midway

Recommended for NAVY CROSS by CinC Pac Ser 18-P15(1)
of July 18--Ref: CinC Pac Ltr. P15(1)/QB/(05) Ser.
3013 of July 16, 1942--~~1st~~ ^{2nd} Bd. Cincpac File P15(1)
/(05) Serial 3112 of July 28, 1942.

Awarded: Aug. 6, 1942 Bd. Awd. Meeting *No change*

BRON Ser. 3060 dtd. 12-19-46 App.
Adm. Name

For extraordinary heroism and distinguished service in
the line of his profession as Squadron Leader of VT-8 in the
AIR Battle of Midway." On June 4, 1942, Lt. Comdr. J.C. Wal-
dron, U.S.N., knowing full well that he was without fighter
protection and that he had insufficient fuel to return to his
carrier, gallantly led his squadron in a torpedo (over)

attack against the enemy. He effectively drove home the attack against the murderous assaults of many enemy aircraft and against an almost solid barrage of anti-aircraft fire. This action was instrumental in the defeat of the enemy forces and was in keeping with the best traditions of the Naval Service.

Perm. Citation & Copies being held in safe VT-8 9/15/42

1397

Nov 25

Recommendation of Sen. Gurney & Rep. Case Have been referred to CinCpac, in case he desires to reconsider his previous award of Navy Cross.

March 1, 1943 CincPac returned correspondence which had been referred to Pacific Fleet Board of Awards, which adhered to its former recommendation for the award of the Navy Cross. No further action.....

The excellent teamwork, resourcefulness, and outstanding devotion to duty displayed by Lieutenant (junior grade) Hainroth, Master Chief Petty Officer (juniors) and the Naval Ser-